W. E. HENLEY

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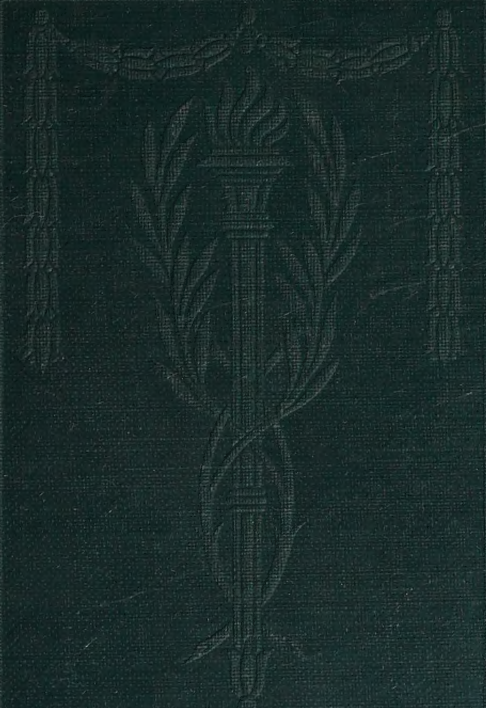

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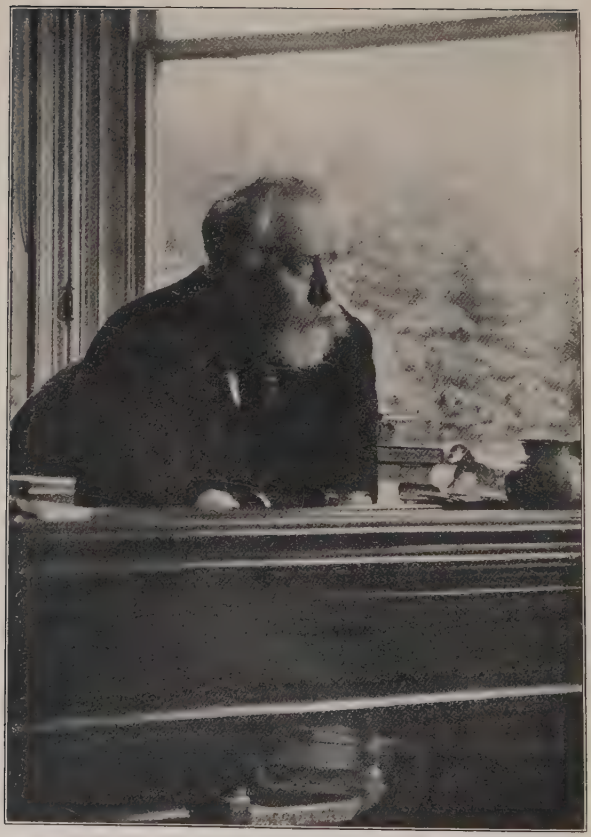

W. E. HENLEY.

From a photograph taken at Worthing in 1899 by Mr. W. B. Blaikie

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

BY

L. COPE CORNFORD

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WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

I

ENTRANCE

THE door opened, and a big man was suddenly framed in the opening. He supported himself with one hand pressed against the woodwork, the other bearing upon an ivory-handled stick. His great head was poised a little backward upon broad shoulders; his upstanding hair and fine-spun beard were of a tawny hue; the eyes of a clear blue, their gaze direct and yet as though dwelling upon far things; the mouth was full-lipped, the face large and square of jaw.

So entered into the dark little room in College Street, Westminster, where he was then editing *The National Observer*, and into the life of the present writer, one of the greatest forces in English letters of the later Victorian age, William Ernest Henley.

The man carried with him an indescribably proud air of tragedy and courage and power. He had the port of a commander. He seated himself at his desk and leaned his arms upon it, lifting his head like a wounded lion. His visitor knew that he moved in the pain of a recent irremediable loss, and in the shadow of impending trouble; that his whole life had been a gallant fight against disastrous odds; and that he stood unbeaten upon the hewn rock of high achievement in art.

"I suppose," said Henley, quietly, "no argument will dissuade you from writing? Well . . . no one could dissuade me. I couldn't, you see, go out to the frontiers—nor can you."

Then he spoke of the work of the present writer. Never had aspirant a counsellor more kind, wiser or more inspiring.

Soon afterwards *The National Observer* (for such are luck and life) died; or, to be more precise, it was sold, its editor resigned, its features were obliterated, and it presently perished of inanition. But its spirit,

which was the spirit of its heroic captain, survived and will survive so long as English literature endures.

Into what kind of age and time Henley was born, it is now to consider.

II

THE TIME

In the year 1867, William Ernest Henley was eighteen years of age. Debarred by his affliction from active physical exercise, his boyhood and his youth were dedicated to reading and to study and to reverie These were his life. At eighteen, he passed the Oxford local examination as a senior candidate, and by that time he had read a vast deal besides the books required by the University. As no man's life and achievement may be rightly estimated apart from his time and lacking acquaintance with those who preceded him, it is necessary to consider somewhat the world into which the poet was born; and the year 1867 would seem a convenient point from which to attempt such a survey.

By the mid-nineteenth century the four great elders who founded a new era in English literature—Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge and Southey—had passed away

They were all born between 1770 and 1774; Wordsworth, surviving the others, died in 1850. Their work, therefore, represented that province of literary inheritance lying beyond the estate of their successors, Byron, Shelley and Keats; which again, with a narrow space between, lay next to the various fields cultivated by Henley's contemporaries. Shelley and Keats died in 1821; Byron died in 1824. Their four elders did indeed survive them: nevertheless, the work of Shelley, Keats and Byron does actually belong, in intention and in accomplishment, to the succeeding epoch. From the death of Byron in 1824 to the publication of Tennyson's first volume of poems in 1830, there is an interval of six years' silence, preceding the new music. In 1842 came Tennyson's second volume. In 1849—the year of Henley's birth—was published the collected edition of the poems of Edgar Allan Poe. In 1865 there appeared the *Atalanta in Calydon* of Algernon Charles Swinburne, and in 1866, his *Poems and Ballads*. Tennyson, Poe, Swinburne: these three were the makers of the wonderful new music; all were great artists; and if

we are to talk of influence it is hard to say which of them wielded the greater potency. And besides Poe there was another voice, rude and powerful, chanting in America: the voice of Walt Whitman, who began to publish in 1855. There was also Longfellow, but with all his admirable qualities he spoke nothing new.

By the year 1867 Robert Browning had done the greater part of his work, *Dramatis Personæ* appearing in 1864; in that very year of 1867, Matthew Arnold had published his *New Poems*. The Verse of Society of this period was being written by Mr. Locker-Lampson and Mr. Austin Dobson; and in this connection, C. S. Calverley and J. K. Stephen are also to be considered.

Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti had published verse in *The Germ* and in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*—the "poems" were not yet exhumed; Christina Georgina Rossetti had published *The Goblin-Market* and *The Prince's Progress;* William Morris had published his *Defence of Guenevere* and—in 1867—*The Life and Death of Jason.*

Henley, in fact, happened to enter upon

life and letters contemporaneously with the P.R.B. The complete history of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood has yet to be written; but it may here be said that if ever it appears, Henley's name will scarce figure in its pages. The influence seems to have left him cold. It is characteristic of him, that at this period of his life, he devoted much time to the study of Pope's ingenious and minute artistry. At the same time it is worth noting that there is a curious sympathy in Henley's work with the work of James Thomson—he who used to sign himself "B. V." (Bysshe Vanolis), the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, first published in 1880. More to the present purpose is it to remark that Thomson had published the admirable "Sunday up the River," in 1869, in *Fraser's Magazine*.

In France, as in England, a new music had awakened. Victor Hugo's *Légende des Siècles* was published in 1859; and he continued to write his marvellous verse until his death. Théophile Gautier, the hero of the French Romantic crusade of 1830, had published his *Émaux et Camées* in

1852, and, enlarged, in 1858. In 1867, Leconte de Lisle and Théodore de Banville had done much of their remarkable work. Charles Baudelaire had died in 1866. In the same year there appeared the admirable collection of the French verse of the Romantics, *Le Parnasse Contemporain.*[1] The pieces were selected by MM. Catulle Mendès and Xavier de Ricard; and the poets represented include Gautier, José Maria de Hérédia, Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, Deschamps, Vacquerie. Here also were some of the first verses of François Coppée, of Catulle Mendès, of Sully-Prudhomme, and of Paul Verlaine, who in later years was a contributor to *The New Review* under Henley's editorship. Here also was the work of Stéphane Mallarmé, who was to become something of a leader in French literature, and who also wrote for Henley. And in 1867, Gautier published his great survey of French verse from 1830.

"These writers were supposed," writes Professor Saintsbury, "all to have sworn allegiance to the doctrine of 'Art for Art's

[1] *The Later Nineteenth Century*, Professor Saintsbury. (Blackwood.)

sake'; to have forsworn 'the subject,' and so forth. As a matter of fact there was little community, and certainly no definite and aggressive purpose,—only a devotion in different degrees to the three great principles of nineteenth-century poetry so often formulated—appeal to the eye, appeal to the ear, and the preference of short lyrical or semi-lyrical pieces, having strong connections with art and literature or philosophy, to large narrative canvases. There was, in addition, something of the romantic devotion to new metres and elaborate harmonies. . . ."[1]

It is not possible here to present even a brief survey of the scope and character of English and French literature of the later nineteenth century. All that can be done is to indicate the many vivid and diverse currents in the stream of things.

The novel, as a literary vehicle, was at this time in the full tide of favour, both in England and in France.

In England, Thackeray's work had been ended in 1863. D'Israeli's greatest novels had all appeared ten years earlier. But Dickens, in 1867, was still writing. Henley,

[1] *The Later Nineteenth Century,* Professor Saintsbury. (Blackwood.)

as a boy, heard Dickens give one of his readings, and never forgot the effect of that extraordinary performance; nor the fine, white hand, upon which flashed a jewel, and which, gesticulating, enthralled that packed and breathless audience. In 1867, Marian Evans, called George Eliot, had achieved popularity, *The Mill on the Floss* having been published in 1860, and *Romola* in 1863; Charles Kingsley had written *Westward Ho !*, *Two Years Ago*, and *Hereward the Wake.* Trollope published *The Last Chronicle of Barset* in 1867. Charles Reade had published *The Cloister and the Hearth* in 1861. Wilkie Collins was in mid-career in 1867, and Henry Kingsley—whom Henley esteemed above Charles—had made his reputation; Mrs. Gaskell had finished her work; Charles Lever's course was nearly run.

George Meredith, to become one of the great figures among the later Victorians, had before 1867 published *The Shaving of Shagpat*, *Farina*, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, *Evan Harrington*, *Sandra Belloni*, and *Vittoria.*

And in America there were Hawthorne

and Herman Melville—especially Herman Melville—author of *Omoo*, *Typee*, *Mardi*, *White Jacket*, etc.—and Samuel Clemens, called Mark Twain.

The first half of the nineteenth century was richly endowed with historians: Sir William Napier, Henry Hallam, Henry Hart Milman, George Grote, Bishop Thirlwall, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Alexander Kinglake, Henry Thomas Buckle, Edward Augustus Freeman, John Richard Green, James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle: these produced a body of historical writing of which the nation might justly be proud; and which recreated the use and study of history in this country.

In France, history was represented by the two great names of Hippolyte Adolphe Taine and Ernest Renan. Other historians and philologists of the time were Gaston Paris, the Duc de Broglie, and Albert Sorel.

In France, too, it was the age of the novel. By the year 1867, the work of Dumas was done: so was the work of Prosper Mérimée, George Sand, Sue, Sandeau; and the new development had begun. Théophile Gautier, although in point of time

he belonged to the antecedent generation, set the example in prose style, which, in the powerful hands of Gustave Flaubert, became a main principle of the new school of literary craftsmanship. Roughly expressed, the theory was that there is only one word, only a single phrase, in the whole range of language, which can rightly express the meaning of the artist. It became the artist's business, therefore, to discover that word, and to beat out that phrase, at any cost soever to himself. The principle, in a word, is the refinement of form to perfection. Gautier, in *Le Capitaine Fracasse*—a work published thirty years after it was designed and began—exemplified the theory in practice. That singular romance is *all* form. What is called the story had so tenuous an existence that it is forgotten ere the reader finishes the book. To Gautier, the appearances of life were far more important than life itself; and so long as these were perfectly presented, the rest was as naught. Flaubert combined the two, welding matter and form. His aim, pursued with a consistent and an increasing passion, was to present life as he

saw it in terms of perfect art. *Madame Bovary* appeared in 1859; *Salammbô* in 1862. Contemporary with Flaubert were *les deux Goncourt*, sworn of the same covenant. Guy de Maupassant, the pupil of Flaubert, was born a year before Henley; so that, master of his art as he was, he does not fall within the present survey. In its essence, the new school in fiction was the prose equivalent of the new school in poetry. It is worth while to stress the point of style; for Henley, like other artists of his time, learned much from the incomparable Frenchmen.

At the same time, it is to be remembered that in France, Victor Hugo was the master-spirit of his age. To consider the prose romances of Hugo apart from his wonderful achievements in verse and in drama, would be futile. For, as Henley wrote of him, "from first to last, from the time of Chateaubriand to the time of Zola, he was a leader of men; and with his departure from the scene the undivided sovereignty of literature became a thing of the past, like Alexander's Empire." [1]

[1] *Hugo. Works,* Vol. V.

In 1867, the career of Zola began with the publication of *Thérèse Raquin*. Alphonse Daudet published *Le Petit Chose* in the following year. It remains to mention Octave Feuillet, whose *Monsieur de Camors* appeared in 1867; the three great Russians, Tourguenieff, Dostoieffsky and Tolstoi, whose works are chiefly known here in the French tongue, and M. Anatole France—to name but these.

In English criticism, there were Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Walter Horatio Pater, John Addington Symonds. Carlyle was to nineteenth-century England what the Hebrew prophets were to the children of Israel; he received, perhaps, much the same kind of attention. Arnold, the elegant scholar (and if the truth must be told, the prig), preached the doctrine of culture in his bland, witty, superior way. The master-gift of Ruskin was eloquence; his theories concerning the practice of art were never of the least service to artists; and it would seem that of all his magnificent volume of lyric exhortation, the one admonitory system which was rejected with contumely by

his contemporaries, his political economy, is to be of enduring value; while his splendid prose remains to be treasured for its own sake. Pater was a hedonist; Symonds a refined and scholarly critic of history and literature. Apart from these, Thomas Henry Huxley wielded the broad axe as the pioneer of scientific thought amid the jungle of prejudice; on the other side, John Henry Newman and the men of the Oxford movement fought for quite another ideal.

In America, Ralph Waldo Emerson represented one aspect of the revelation of which Whitman enforced another.

Such were the men who among others influenced the thought of the time in the English-speaking world. But for the student there were foreign influences also.

In France at this time, as at other times, the art of criticism was far more highly developed than it was in England. The French people, unlike the English, demand intelligent criticism and appreciate it.

But it must here suffice to do no more than indicate the place of Sainte-Beuve, of

Renan and of Taine. Of these, Sainte-Beuve should be particularly considered. In 1869, when he died, he had been writing his *Causeries de Lundi* for near twenty years; and, according to Professor Saintsbury, his work "serves as direct and immediate pattern and manual alike to the renaissance of English criticism[1] . . ." The remark is pertinent, for Henley himself became one of the most brilliant exponents of that art known to English letters.

How much, in the year 1867, the boy of eighteen apprehended of the vast and shining realm of literature in which he was valiantly to strive and triumphantly to achieve, it is vain to ask. We know, however, that six years later—six years of study and of miscellaneous reading—he taught himself, while he was a patient in the Old Edinburgh Infirmary, Spanish, Italian and German, and read much in "Big, yellow books, quite impudently French"[2]; and that when he emerged into the great world, he was competent to write

[1] *The Later Nineteenth Century* Professor Saintsbury. (Blackwood.)

[2] *In Hospital*, Envoy. *Works*, Vol. I.

of French literature in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and to take his part in critical work of rare quality done for the London reviews.

The later nineteenth century saw the beginning of the great extension of periodical literature: of the weekly review, the monthly review, the monthly magazine and the newspaper. The predecessors of the new weekly reviews were: *The Examiner*, *The Athenæum* and *The Spectator*. Charles Dickens, in the 'fifties, started *Household Words;* then came *The Saturday Review*, and *All the Year Round*. *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine* had long been established. Now appeared *The Cornhill Magazine* and *Macmillan's Magazine*. In addition to the quarterlies, the monthly reviews were established: *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Contemporary Review*, and *The Nineteenth Century*, to be followed by many others. In 1864, *The Pall Mall Gazette* was founded, with, says Professor Saintsbury, "one of the most brilliant staffs ever known, including many of the original *Saturday* writers and others."

Among the weekly reviews, the *Saturday*

took at this time the chief place. A high standard of knowledge and ability was demanded of its contributors, and it was the rule that they should preserve anonymity. The old *Saturday* was fearless and wholly independent; its criticism was informed, leisurely and incisive, often witty, sometimes cruel; for it conceived a main part of its duty to reside in scourging folly; and the whip was deftly applied.

The immediate effect of the increase of periodicals was to open a wider market to the writer. A certain standard of excellence was exacted, and payment was often liberal. During the third quarter of the nineteenth century, when Henley began to earn his living by his pen, there still existed a literary tradition and a demand for good work among the great middle-class body of the reading public. The periodical served indeed not only as the vehicle of sound criticism and solid information but as the channel through which the novelists and the poets of the day addressed their readers.

Henley, unlucky in much, was lucky at least in that the market had been estab-

lished by the time he needed it; and in default of which he would have been hard put to it indeed. For the age into which he was born was not the age he would have chosen. In the common phrase, he was born too soon—say, twenty years too soon. It may be surmised that destiny had determined that he should prepare the way for the next generation, for the later nineteenth century was distinguished by a worship of Mammon only less savage than the inhuman orgie of the preceding fifty years, because wealth had accumulated. The great middle-class was swallowed up in the contemplation of its own vast riches and its impeccable and complacent respectability. A consuming lust for money had left neither leisure for art nor the faculty for appreciating it. Religion there was; religion tied hand and foot by dogmatic respectability: sentiment there was, severely limited in scope by the adamant restrictions surrounding the Young Person; art there was; and it stands embodied in the Albert Memorial for succeeding generations to revere. England, in fact (to quote Henley), went about in

the Shadow of the Albert Hat. Everything outside that charmed circle was—not respectable; and there, as Mr. Podsnap justly observed, was an end of it.

There were rebels, of course. There was my Lord Byron, but he was dead; there were Keats, Shelley—also dead. There was James Thomson, "B.V."; but what were you to think of an associate of Charles Bradlaugh? There was Swinburne, who, of course, was banned as improper. There was George Meredith, but few persons understood his language. There was Walt Whitman, whose notion of what was best for the Young Person was to strip her naked, and who said: "The attitude of great poets is to cheer up slaves and horrify despots."

And there was Henley: whether in his youth he knew it or not, a leader of revolt, if ever there was one.

To enquire precisely in what manner Henley was affected by this influence or that, is a futile exercise. When he began to write, he imitated none. He expressed himself. And himself was a leader of revolt; of revolt against outworn tradition,

against the awful unreality that infected England like a disease; against false sentiment, against complacent respectability. You might—if you could—refuse to listen to Henley; you might—indeed you did—refuse to publish his extremely subversive poetry; what you could not do was to ignore him. He could no more be ignored than an active volcano can be disregarded when its thunder fills your ears and the hot ashes singe your garments. He was there, like the volcano; and always flaming.[1]

And like lava his work remains, set unchangeably in the form into which his fiery spirit wrought it: and having burned its own pathway in the process.

"Dichten ist ein Übermuth," said Goethe.

[1] I quote a friend of Henley and of mine.—L. C. C.

III

BIOGRAPHICAL

William Ernest Henley was born on August 23, 1849, at Gloucester. His father was a bookseller in that city; not, it seems, a very successful man of business, but gifted with ability and a singular charm of manner. The elder Henley was of an ancient yeoman stock; his wife, born Emma Morgan, was descended from Joseph Warton, the critic[1]; of whom William Ernest Henley possessed an engraved portrait, limning his ancestor as a grave, bewigged gentleman, solid of feature, with a full, intelligent eye. William Ernest was the eldest of five sons. One of his brothers, Edward John, was an actor of great talent; he died in the United States in 1898. Another, Anthony Warton, is a painter of landscape.

William Ernest was a pupil of the Crypt Grammar School, an ancient foundation,

[1] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp.

dating from early in the sixteenth century. In 1860, when Henley was at the most receptive period of life, Thomas Edward Brown, the parson and poet, was appointed head master. Brown's own experience of Gloucester seems to have been unhappy; but in later life he must have found his reward in that he was enabled to do so much for one pupil at least. Henley's account of the matter is contained in his essay on "T.E.B."

"Brown," he writes, "opened to me ways of thought and speech that . . . discovered me the beginnings, the true materials, of myself. . . . What he did for me, practically, was to suggest such possibilities in life and character as I had never dreamed. He was singularly kind to me at a moment when I needed kindness even more than I needed encouragement." [1]

The friendship between master and pupil endured to the last; and it fell to the pupil to write the eulogy of the master and his epitaph. It may be said, briefly, that in this master destiny (shall we say?) gave the boy Henley the one teacher out of all the world fitted for his needs.

[1] *Works.* Vol. IV.

Truly, the boy needed kindness; for in his twelfth year he was attacked by that tuberculous disease which tortured him at intervals throughout his life. At that time, the proper treatment was not known; had Henley been born fifty years later, in all probability he could have been speedily cured. As it was, he was crippled; and being crippled, he was driven in upon books and dreams and study.

How, in after years, he recalled the days of his boyhood, is told in his *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*[1]: told, that is, in part; for he ever scorned to speak of his sufferings. He told, instead, how——

"Thus cried, thus called aloud, to the child heart
The magian East: thus the child eyes
Spelled out the wizard message by the light
Of the sober, workaday hours
They saw, week in week out, pass, and still pass
In the sleepy Minster City, folded kind
In ancient Severn's arm,
Amongst her water-meadows and her docks,
Whose floating populace of ships—
Galliots and luggers, light-heeled brigantines,
Bluff barques and rake-hell fore-and-afters—brought
To her very doorsteps and geraniums
The scents of the World's End; the calls
That may not be gainsaid to rise and ride
Like fire on some high errand of the race;"

[1] *Works.* Vol. I.

For the rest, let those who know what were the character and complexion of a provincial sea-trading town in the later nineteenth century draw their own conclusions. One of them will surely be that, set it wheresoever, the poet's heart will seek and find its proper nourishment.

At the age of eighteen, Henley passed the Oxford local examination as senior candidate.[1] He continued to live at home; his disease compelled the amputation of one foot; and the doctors informed him that in order to save his life it would be necessary to lose the other foot. They also seem to have spoken with some disrespect of Professor Joseph (afterwards Lord) Lister, who had begun his new antiseptic treatment at Edinburgh. Henley characteristically determined to save his foot if it were possible; and, also characteristically, decided that, if it were possible, Lister was the man to save it. Accordingly, in the year 1873, he went to Edinburgh—he is silent with regard to the suffering so painful a journey must have inflicted upon a lad racked with disease and bitterly poor. At

[1] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp.

any rate, when he arrived he was desperate; and when Lister asked him why he had come to him, Lister, Henley replied in plain terms that it was because the rest of the medical profession had declared that he, Professor Lister, was (in effect) totally incompetent. Lister said nothing; but he saved the foot.

Henley was his patient in the Old Infirmary, Edinburgh, for twenty months. During that time, he taught himself Spanish, German and Italian, and he wrote the now famous verses "In Hospital." [1] In these astonishing and poignant rhythms, which, in their way, are unique in literature, is told all that we need to know of Henley's personal experience. From—

> "These corridors and stairs of stone and iron,
> Cold, naked, clean—half-workhouse and half-jail,"

To

> "Free . . . !
> Dizzy, hysterical, faint,
> I sit, and the carriage rolls on with me
> Into the wonderful world,"

there is presented the essential Hospital,

[1] *Works.* Vol. I.

done once and done for ever, by a young man of six-and-twenty.

There are, however, side illuminations. At the end of 1873, the private ward—Henley calls it that "transformed back-kitchen"—occupied by the poet was shared by two small boys, Willie Morrison and Roden Shields.

> "Here in this dim, dull, double-bedded room,
> I play the father to a brace of boys,
> Ailing but apt for every sort of noise,
> Bedfast but brilliant yet with health and bloom.
> Roden, the Irishman is 'sieven past,'
> Blue-eyed, snub-nosed, chubby, and fair of face.
> Willie's but six, and seems to like the place,
> A cheerful little collier to the last."[1]

More than thirty years after, Roden Shields, writing in *The Cornhill Magazine*,[2] returns the compliment.

"I used to watch him looking hard at the roof, thinking, smiling, and frowning as if he saw nice things and talked to people. I never dared question him in these moods, but I resolved when I was a man I would get pillows at my back and a desk fitted to my bed, and read and smile and frown like Henley. . . .

[1] *In Hospital*," XVIII. *Works*, Vol. I.

[2] *A Blurred Memory of Childhood*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, August 1905.

He was a good comrade, a kind friend; and I wept bitterly when we parted, and I think he felt it a little too."

Out of the moods that awed Master Roden—he must have attempted interruption, which Henley would never permit—came verses; and some of these were sent to *The Cornhill Magazine*, of which Leslie (afterwards Sir Leslie) Stephen was then editor. Some time in 1875 (the letter is undated) Stephen writes as follows to his wife:—

"*Edinburgh.*

". . . I had an interesting visit to my poor contributor. He is a miserable cripple in the infirmary, who has lost one foot and is likely to lose another—or rather hopes just to save it, and has a crippled hand besides. He has been eighteen months laid up here, and in that time has taught himself Spanish, Italian and German. He writes poems of the Swinburne kind,[1] and reads such books as he can get hold of. I have taken one of his poems for *The Cornhill*. I went to see Stevenson this

[1] With all respect, it may be suggested that the description is mistaken.

morning, Colvin's friend, and told him all about this poor creature, and am going to take him there this afternoon. He will be able to lend him books, and perhaps to read his MSS. and be otherwise useful. So I hope that my coming to Edinburgh will have done good to one living creature. . . ." [1]

Stevenson found Henley sitting "up in his bed with his hair all tangled," and talking "as cheerfully as if he had been in a king's palace." [2] Leslie Stephen, kind soul, did better than he knew; for the two young men became close friends; each learned something from the other; and both, by different roads, attained renown. Henley limned Stevenson at this time in their lives in his "Apparition" [3]; Stevenson used Henley as the model for John Silver in *Treasure Island;* a proceeding of which the original never quite approved; and in his essay on *Talk and Talkers,* Stevenson drew Henley as "Burly" in that goodly company. Henley told the

[1] *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen,* by Frederick William Maitland. (London: Duckworth. MCMVI.)
[2] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.,* 2nd Supp.
[3] *In Hospital,* XXV. *Works,* Vol. I.

present writer that he had learned this from Stevenson—that journalism could be treated as an art. Accepting that statement, it may be observed that Henley put the lesson to excellent uses.

It was due indeed to his sojourn in Edinburgh, to the cure wrought by the wise and patient Lister, to the work Henley did and the friends he made there, that Henley began his career upon a sure foundation. After leaving the Old Infirmary in 1875—aged twenty-six—he worked for a time upon the French biographical section of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Messrs. A. & C. Black) his contributions including papers upon Chénier and Chastelard. In the meantime he had began to contribute to London journals.[1]

In 1877, having returned to London, he was appointed editor of *London*, a weekly review, founded by George Glasgow Brown, a common friend of Henley and Stevenson. It was Henley's ill fortune throughout to conduct journals which were not financial successes. Whatever may have been the reasons underlying financial failure, it is

[1] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp.

certain that there was no man living who was better fitted than Henley to carry into magnificent practice the ideal he set before him. The fact is he was born to command; and command he did. His destiny was written in his forehead; from the first it marked him conspicuous among men of letters; and among those who valued literature above gain, his sovereignty was instantly recognised.

He began, as a young man of twenty-eight, by editing *London;* and if that print came to an untimely end, its quality may be judged by the contributions of Henley himself, including the essays, afterwards republished in *Views and Reviews, I* [1] "on Longfellow, Balzac, Sidney, Tourneur, *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, Borrow, George Eliot, and Mr. Frederick Locker"; many of his early verses,[2] which, ten years later, when they were published in a volume, made a reputation which time but continues to confirm and to enlarge; and Stevenson's admirable *New Arabian Nights*, since known to the whole English-speaking world. But

[1] *Works.* Vol. V.
[2] *Works.* Vol. VI.

—so strange a thing is public taste—it was said at the time that the publication of Stevenson's fantasies went far to ruin the circulation of the paper.

In 1878 Henley married Anna, daughter of Edward Boyle and Marianne Mackie.[1] It was a bold action for "a lame man with his family on his back." The phrase is not the writer's but belongs to one of those concerned, and expresses the simple fact. Henley's father died leaving nothing, or less than nothing; and it fell to Henley to help his family. Whereof no more need be said than that Henley, at one time or another, stoically drank the cup of poverty to the dregs.

There was, for instance, one occasion when he and his brother Anthony were absolutely penniless. Henley, exhausted with hunger, lay on his bed; towards evening, Anthony, in desperation, went out. In the light of the street-lamp he beheld a shilling glittering on the pavement . . . his heart stood still until a poor woman had passed the treasure without seeing it. Anthony knew as well as most

[1] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp.

people how far a shilling can be made to go; and the brothers had supper. . .

But in 1878, whatever happened afterwards, Henley considered that he had enough money (it was little enough) to justify his marriage; and so did Miss Boyle. It was arranged by telegram; they were married at Edinburgh; and what imports us to know of the rest may be sufficiently gathered from his verses. To put the matter negatively, neither of the two ever regretted their action for a single moment.

In the same year *London* was discontinued; and during the next four years Henley contributed to *The Athenæum*, *The St. James Gazette* under Mr. Morley (now Lord Morley), *Vanity Fair*, dramatic criticism to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and a great deal of miscellaneous matter to *The Saturday Review*. Those things which, selected by a friend, Henley approved as worth recovering from what he called "the shot rubbish" of these and subsequent years of journalism, were republished in *Views and Reviews, I.*[1] In the meantime, he continued to write

[1] *Works.* Vol. V.

verse, and still failed to find a publisher who would risk issuing them in a volume.

"Henley's verse," writes Mr. T. F. Henderson,[1] "was the occasional recreation of a life mainly occupied with editing and the criticism of literature and art." The statement is unfortunately phrased. Henley's verse was the serious business of his life. First and before all he was a poet.

During these years, too, Henley was working in collaboration with Stevenson upon the play *Deacon Brodie*. It was never widely popular in this country; but it was successful in the United States, where Edward Henley played the name-part upon tour in 1888. *Deacon Brodie* was privately printed in 1880, the finished version being printed in 1888. It was produced at Pullan's Theatre of Varieties, Bradford, on the 28th December, 1882, and was performed at the Prince's Theatre, London, on the 2nd July, 1884, and in the same year at Edinburgh.[2]

In 1882 Henley was appointed editor of *The Magazine of Art*. He was then thirty-

[1] *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp.
[2] *Ibid.*

three years of age; owning not only a wide and an exact knowledge of English, French, Italian, Spanish literature and a certain amount of German literature but a remarkable knowledge of graphic art in all its aspects. He was endowed with a memory of extraordinary retentiveness and precision, enabling him to quote without reference as accurately as though the page lay open before him. If he did not take all knowledge to be his province, he certainly took all art and all literature.

It is sufficient for the moment to note that *The Magazine of Art* was a living chronicle of the art of the day, never descending to the trivial, always informing, vigorous and bold; that in it Henley made known the art of Rodin to this country; appreciated the work of James McNeill Whistler; and gave to Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson, the cousin of Robert Louis Stevenson, the opening to his curious, subtle and admirable faculty of criticism.[1] R. A. M. Stevenson is known to the public by his *Velasquez* and his *Rubens;* but had it not been for Henley and *The Magazine*

[1] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp.

of Art, these excellent essays had in all likelihood never been.

"... I love to think," wrote Henley, after the death of R. A. M. Stevenson in 1900, "if you will, to cherish the illusion: that what is called art criticism can scarce ever be quite the same as it was when he began his work of suggestion, edification, inspiration ... it was my privilege to put him in the right way, to shape his beginnings, to find him outlets for the critical stuff that was seething and teeming in him: even as it was my pain to overlook his efforts to write formal English, and so to discipline his hand that in the end the *Velasquez* became possible." [1]

The emergence of R. A. M. Stevenson at this time is worth noting, for it exemplifies Henley's conception of the duties of an editor, his relations with the aspirant, and his idea of what is called art criticism. The two words sound a dangerous battle-cry, but, according to Henley's account of the matter, there need be no strife. When he conducted *The Magazine of Art*, he was a

[1] *A Critic of Art, Views and Reviews, II. Works*, Vol. VI.

critic of art, or nothing. It is well, therefore, at this stage in his career, to mark his own definition of his office. In conversation with the present writer he put it in one word: "Interpreter." In his essay upon R. A. M. Stevenson, quoted above, he strikes, as usual, straight to the heart of the matter.

"Now, there are critics and critics, and between them it is as variable service as between your fat King and your lean Beggar. 'Enfin,' Balzac said . . . 'Enfin il passa critique comme tous les artistes qui mentent à leurs débuts.' This he said, being well nigh at the end of his career, in a moment of peculiar scorn; and there is a sense in which the saying is eternally true; a sense, too, in which it is capable of universal application. . . . Comes the question: *What* is a critic? And even here, in face of the answer that a critic is a man with a special and peculiar gift of appreciation, you will find, if you care to look, a certain indestructible element of rightness in Balzac's description."

Henley goes on to cite the case of Sainte-Beuve: who failed in verse, failed in fiction; "yet was he an incomparable critic of the arts in which he failed; and we

are as like to see another Hugo, another Alfred de Vigny even, as another Ste. Beuve."

We may leave it at that: observing, however, that Henley did not fail in fiction, for it was an art he never essayed: "Because," as he once said to the present writer, "I have no invention." Few men of letters have estimated, at the very onset of their career, their limitations and also their powers so exactly: few have exhibited so transparent and so wholly unaffected a candour in respect of them. Nor did Henley fail in painting or in sculpture, which arts he never attempted. Nor did he fail in music, for he was a born musician, owning a talent not only for appreciation but for composition and for execution. Nor did he fail in poetry, for he was a great poet. And to a poet what power shall be denied?

We return to the single word, Interpreter. And there never was an Interpreter consumed with so splendid a fire of generous and abounding enthusiasm as was Henley.

In 1886 Henley ceased to edit *The Magazine of Art*, but he continued for some time

to act as adviser to the *Art Journal.* During this year he visited Paris; and in Paris, M. Auguste Rodin did that bust of him, a replica of which was placed in St. Paul's after his death, and of which a photogravure was published in the *Poems* of 1898, and in Volume I of the *Works.*

In the meantime, three more plays in which he had collaborated with R. L. Stevenson had been printed: *Beau Austin* and *Admiral Guinea* in 1884, *Macaire* in the following year. None of these achieved more than a success of esteem. In 1887, Henley's play "*Mephisto.* A new and original travestie by Byron M'Guiness," with new music by Mr. D. Caldicott and Mr. Ernest Bucalossi, was produced on Whit Monday, June 14th, and was played for some weeks at the Royalty Theatre, London, Edward Henley playing Mephisto, and Miss Constance Gilchrist playing Marguerite.

In the year 1888, Henley being then thirty-nine, there was published *A Book of Verses.* If he did not at once enter into complete possession of his kingdom, it is because time alone can endow him with his

full sovereignty. But *A Book of Verses* instantly indicated his title to the estate. Here is his own account of the matter, prefixed to the definitive edition of the *Poems* published ten years later, in 1898—

"The work of revision has reminded me that, small as is this book of mine, it is all in the matter of verse that I have to show for the years between 1872 and 1897. A principal reason is that, after spending the better part of my life in the pursuit of poetry, I found myself (about 1877) so utterly unmarketable that I had to own myself beaten in art, and to addict myself to journalism for the next ten years. Came the production by my old friend, Mr. H. B. Donkin, in his little book of 'Voluntaries' (1888), done for that East-End Hospital to which he has devoted so much time and energy and skill, of those unrhyming rhythms in which I had tried to quintessentialise, as (I believe) one scarce can do in rhyme, my memories of the Old Edinburgh Infirmary. They had long since been rejected by every editor of standing in London—I had well nigh said in the world; but as soon as Mr. Nutt had read them, he entreated me to look for more. I did as I was told; old dusty sheaves were dragged to light; the work of selection and correction was begun; I burned

much; I found that, after all, the lyrical instinct had slept—not died; I ventured (in brief) *A Book of Verses.*" [1]

Here is a remarkable history. Much, no doubt, might be said of the dulness of editors and publishers: but to what purpose? These respectable persons are perpetually haunted, perhaps as an inevitable condition of their business, by a spectre called the public, which somehow they must contrive to amuse or to interest. The difficulty is, of course, that there is no such thing as the public: for there are twenty publics, each differing from the other; and these are not conveniently grouped into sections, but are mingled in a mass whose lineaments are undecipherable. The purveyor of literature may take his choice: he may put on the market such goods as he hopes, or imagines, will please the larger number; or he may select his wares with a single eye to their intrinsic value. The first method is commonly

[1] *Poems.* By William Ernest Henley. (London: David Nutt. 1898.) These numbers, but not the preface, are included in the *Works*, Vols. I. and II.

adopted : the second, being merely rational, needs courage to employ; yet of the two it is probably the more likely to yield gain; and gain is (frankly) the object of the whole business.

Henley himself never considered either gain or the public for a moment : and it may of course be argued that in the result he won neither wealth nor popularity. A wider view sets the matter in a clearer perspective. The poet must almost invariably create his own public; and the process is often long. But, in the case of work of the first rank, the ultimate result is certain. Editor and publisher, however, work for the immediate profit : it is not necessarily their business to take risks.

Henley describes himself as being "beaten in art." He was never beaten in art, but he was often foiled in commerce with what are known as business men; to whom he unconsciously attributed the single aim and the absolute sincerity which were his own. The fact is that art and business do not agree. They never have agreed, and will never mate, except by accident.

Again, in his preface, Henley distinguishes

sharply between art and journalism. In the case under consideration, he uses the word art as synonymous with poetry; and Henley virtually affirms that his strenuous and incessant work in journalism paralysed, for the time being, the "lyrical instinct." It may be so; but it is to be remembered that his journalism *was* art. Whether it was worth having at the price of verses which, under other conditions, might have been given to the world, is another question.

In 1889, was born Henley's only child, Margaret. Her portrait was painted in oils by Charles Wellington Furse, A.R.A.

In the same year, Henley went to Edinburgh to edit *The Scots Observer*, a weekly review. Its name was changed to *The National Observer*, and in 1891 its head-quarters were removed to London.

Henley conducted that unique journal during five crowded and glorious years. It was said then, and it is said now, that *The National Observer* was not popular. In the sense of a wide circulation, of suiting the tastes of a large miscellany of persons who could afford to pay sixpence, it was not popular. But the question is not so much

of what it was not, as of what it was. *The National Observer* stood, politically, for the honour of England; in letters, for the great English tradition; in art, for informed and fearless criticism; in style, for life, colour, wit, urbanity and vigour. It gave no quarter to pretence, imposture, false sentiment, oppression, but it generously welcomed good work of whatever variety; and there are some of the men of *The National Observer* who look back from their prosperous to-day to the lean time when they got their first chance in those brilliant pages. To *The National Observer* Henley gave his whole magnificent endowment of energy and knowledge and craftsmanship. He made enemies; but he made staunch friends; he hit hard, and took punishment with a jovial carelessness; and he radiated an enthusiasm, a courage, and a hearty delight in real things, that made up one of the most potent influences of the time. It exercised its most forcible effect upon the young men who, failing to find appreciation or encouragement elsewhere, gathered by a natural attraction about Henley.

"As critic, he had the rare combination of enthusiasm and wakeful judgment. Pretentiousness felt his whip smartly, the accepted imbecile had to bear the weight of his epigram. But merit under a cloud or just emerging he sparkled on or lifted to the public view. He was one of the main supports of good literature in our time."

So wrote of him George Meredith, in *The Henley Memorial.*

Such an influence, so magical a force, in letters, does not pass with him who wielded it, but remains a source of inspiration, an example of achievement, to succeeding generations.

In 1890, Mr. Nutt published *Views and Reviews, I,*[1] a volume which, in the sphere of criticism, did for Henley what, in the domain of poetry, the publication of *A Book of Verses* had done for him two years previously. *Views and Reviews* was dedicated "To the Men of *The Scots Observer.*" These wonderful and charming little masterpieces, revealing a new insight, a new enthusiasm, a spirit wise and illuminating and humane, were collected from *The*

[1] *Works.* Vol. V.

Athenæum, *The Academy*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Magazine of Art*, and *The Scots Observer*. "The reprinted matter," wrote Henley in his preface, "has been subjected to such a process of revision and reconstitution that much of it is practically new, while little or none remains as it was." He never let work leave his study until it was as good as he could make it.

In the same year (1890) *Beau Austin* was produced by Mr. (now Sir Herbert) Tree at the Haymarket Theatre, London. In the following year was published "*Lyra Heroica:* A Book of Verse for Boys, selected and arranged by William Ernest Henley."[1] These noble numbers date from Shakespeare to Kipling; they make the first and finest anthology of its kind—and it is done once for all. "To set forth, as only art can, the beauty and the joy of living, the beauty and blessedness of death, the glory of battle and adventure, the

[1] First (Library) edition, October 1891. (London: David Nutt.) Second (School) edition, February 1892. To this edition were added notes by W. W. Greg and L. Cope Cornford; and it has been several times reprinted.

nobility of devotion—to a cause, an ideal, a passion even—the dignity of resistance, the sacred quality of patriotism, that is my ambition here." Thus did Henley describe the scope and purpose of a book which ought to make an integral part of the education—or rather, perhaps, be included in the library—of every English-speaking boy.

In 1892 were published *The Song of the Sword and other Verses*,[1] and *Views and Reviews, II*,[2] and the three plays, *Deacon Brodie, Beau Austin, Admiral Guinea*.[3]

The second volume of *Views and Reviews* deals with the art of painting. It consists of selections from the Catalogue *raisonné* of the Loan Collection of French and Dutch pictures of the Edinburgh International Exhibition of 1886, a document which was the first of its kind to appear in England, and which was published in 1888; from the *Century of Artists*, the memorial of the Glasgow Exhibition of 1888, done for Messrs. MacLehose; from the "Catalogue of a Loan Collection of Pictures by the

[1] *Works.* Vol. I. [2] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI.
[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII.

Great French and Dutch Romanticists of this Century," done in 1889 for Messrs. Dowdeswell; from the *Sir Henry Raeburn*, published in 1890 by the Royal Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in Scotland; and from *The National Observer* and *The Pall Mall Magazine*.

As usual, Henley states his position in plain terms.

> "To hold opinions and state conclusions about an art whose technical processes are strange, and whose practice is impossible: this, it has ever seemed to me, is to take oneself more seriously than he may do that would sit well with posterity. And yet, *humanum est errare:* to hold views, and to publish them, is human; and in this bookling I confess myself as naturally given as the rest." [1]

The rest? What of the rest? What is called art criticism has fallen to-day into so profound an abyss of inanity, and worse, that one may say that since Henley wrote there has been no successor. The pretentious and often malicious rubbish which is imposed upon the public to-day has

[1] *Works.* Vol. VI, Preface.

nothing to do with either art or criticism. Painters themselves have been so infuriated —and justly—that the very word criticism turns their stomach. Nevertheless, it may here be submitted that the extraordinary wealth of knowledge and subtlety of appreciation contained in *Views and Reviews, II,* are at least worth consideration; and as for the public, were they to study these delightful, instructive and brilliant essays, it is safe to say that, not only could they utterly reject the stuff which editors now think good enough for them, but they would gain much pleasure with knowledge.

In this matter, as in others, Henley was a pioneer. He could, and did, sway opinion and change the drift of thought. In the prefatory note to *Views and Reviews, II,*[1] he tells us that "I have found myself revising stuff which has so much the trick of to-day as to seem commonplace and old. Yet it was written near a dozen years ago, and, at the time of writing, sounded alike violent and new and singular." The comment is significant. As he insisted upon a return to first principles, and witnessed

[1] *Works.* Vol. VI.

the effect of his teaching, so, despite the appalling deliquescence that followed the cessation of his writing, there will presently occur a reaction, inspired by his books.

In the same year, 1892, Henley initiated an enterprise whose fulfilment conferred an immense benefit upon students of English letters, the editing of the great series of Tudor Translations, which, beginning with Florio's *Montaigne*, ended (after Henley's death) with the Tudor Bible. In the following year was published *London Voluntaries and other Verses*;[1] and Henley received the degree of LL.D. from the University of St. Andrews.

There fell upon Henley, in 1894, the most devastating stroke of his life. His daughter and only child, died.

Later in the same year *The National Observer* was sold and Henley resigned his editorship. The triumphant voyage of that gallant vessel was ended. It was a voyage of adventure from first to last; her captain vailed his topsails to no craft afloat, and freighted his ship with rare merchandise; yet she was of so little account to the

[1] *Works.* Vol. II.

business men of merry England that they let her drive upon the rocks, and so go to pieces.

Mr. William Heinemann, however, fitted out another venture, *The New Review*, a monthly magazine. Henley conducted it, as only he could conduct it, gathering such contributors about him as only he could collect, during four years, when it was discontinued. During that time, *The New Review* made the reputations of two at least among its writers, Mr. Joseph Conrad and Mr. H. G. Wells.

In 1894, and during the next two or three years, besides his work upon *The New Review*, Henley had in hand the Tudor Translations;[1] a dictionary of *Slang and its Analogues*, in which Mr. J. S. Farmer was associated with him;[2] an edition of *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, with Mr. T. F. Henderson;[3] with Mr. Charles Whibley,

[1] See above, p. 50.

[2] The last part was issued in 1904.

[3] *The Poetry of Robert Burns*: Henley and Henderson. With a Terminal Essay on the poet's "Life, Genius and Achievement," by W. E. Henley. 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. C. and E. C. Jack. 1896–7.) Centenary edition. The Essay is included in *Works*, Vol. III.

the editing of *A Book of English Prose*;[1] the selection and editing of *A London Garland from Four Centuries of Verse*;[2] the selection and editing of an anthology of *English Lyrics: Chaucer to Pope*;[3] the editing, with biographical sketches, of *Byron's Letters*.[4]

These works, alike by virtue of their scholarship, taste, critical acumen and style, rank every one of them as a classic. For by this time Henley was recognised, not only by the few who had long known his powers but, by the world of letters, as a master critic and a master writer. In the Tudor Translations, prefaced with invaluable explanatory essays, and printed with every circumstance of dignity, the student is conducted to the immortal examples of the great prose of the English Renaissance. *A Book of English Prose*, designed for the delight and instruction of

[1] Published 1894.

[2] Published 1895. In the same year Henley contributed a Preface to the Poems of Mr. Wilfred Blunt.

[3] Published in 1897.

[4] Volume I only was published. (London: W. Heinemann. 1897.) The biographical sketches are included in *Works*, Vol. IV.

boyhood as of age, gives the classic examples of narrative dealing with incident and adventure. The anthologies of verse, gathered by a poet, are inestimable treasures; and the volume of *English Lyrics* is prefaced by an essay upon the Lyric, which is a little masterpiece of criticism.

The essay on the "Life, Genius and Achievement" of Robert Burns affords a characteristic example of the manner in which Henley's work was sometimes received at first and of the recognition which it ultimately won. The *Burns* incidentally destroyed a good deal of false sentiment and totally abolished a foolish superstition; setting up in their place the figure of a real man, a real poet, and a true Scotsman. It was greeted with fury and invective; and then, as Henley sat still and bantered "the Common Burnsite," the attacking party suddenly found no more to say and subsided; and in the result, Henley held the field, and his portrait of Burns was quietly accepted for what it is, the truth.

Henley was a critic not less of life than of literature; it was, indeed, his courageous and unfaltering grip of the real in life that

endowed him with his extraordinary perception in art. Hence it is that his histories in little of Byron [1] and of the men of Byron's time are things unique of their kind. To read them—and the present writer is not the only student who was constrained to read them at a sitting because he could not leave off—is to live in Byron's world. "A dreadful age, no doubt: for all its solid foundations, of faith and dogma in the Church and of virtue and solvency in the State, a fierce, drunken, gambling, 'keeping,' adulterous, high-living, hard-drinking, hard-hitting, brutal age. But," adds Henley, "it was Byron's."

One of the amazing things connected with Henley's work on Byron is that, as he told the present writer, he wrote it—studded as it is with dates, references, genealogies and cross-references—without using notes.

In the year 1894 *Macaire* was included in the book of the Henley-Stevenson plays.[2] In 1897, *Admiral Guinea* was produced; and (to anticipate its history) was revived

[1] *Works.* Vol. IV. See also *Pippin* and *Old England*, in the same volume.

[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII.

at the Royalty Theatre (the Repertory Theatre) Glasgow, on the 19th April, 1909, and on the 4th June following at His Majesty's Theatre, London,[1] when Miss Elizabeth Robins most admirably spoke the Prologue.[2] The present writer was present on the occasion of the performance at His Majesty's Theatre, and he could not then, nor can he now, discover any adequate reason to account for the fact that the play did not take the public fancy. Such is the luck of the theatre, inconstant ever, and ever inexplicable.

During these years, 1894 to 1898, when Henley's true position in art and letters had come to recognition, his house was the resort of men of every kind and every degree. Statesmen, Ministers, soldiers, sailors, travellers, men of letters of all ranks and varieties from peers to journalists, painters, sculptors, the wealthy amateur and the penniless aspirant, visited the poet; and one and all came not to talk but to hear and to take counsel. In what company soever, Henley ruled as by right.

[1] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp.
[2] *Works.* Vol. II.

Yet there was never a master of good talk more eager to listen and to learn, none more apprehensive, or more simply humourous. Stevenson speaks of his "magnificent geniality," and the phrase is apt. It was Henley's salient characteristic; but it was not more remarkable than his boyish zest and simplicity. He was as easily pleased as a jolly high-spirited boy. He could, and did, plunge joyously into battle with his peers, as Stevenson, in his essay on *Talk and Talkers*, describes the custom of "Burly" to be. Both were then young men. In later life, Henley liked better to hearken, to elicit, to drop here and there into the stream of converse the terse comment, the witty epithet, the pithy denunciation, the phrase of sympathy. For the man was compact of loyalty and kindness, a great magnanimous brave nature, honest as the skin between his brows. He was merely incapable of a mean thought, of an insincere impulse. As Stevenson says somewhere of D'Artagnan, the whole man rang true, like a good sovereign. That absolute sincerity is a rare quality enough; in Henley's case, one took it for granted

unconsciously; and it is only upon looking back across a wider experience of men and of the world, that one perceives the singularity of that essential virtue, upon which, as upon granite, Henley's character was founded.

After his home at Croydon had been shattered by his bereavement, Henley took a small house at Barnes. It was long and low; garlanded with climbing foliage; a latticed balcony overlooked the river, and the lonely fields beyond. The study window opened upon the balcony; and seated at his desk—a desk unique of its kind, rather like a harpsichord in shape, the desk at which he had edited *The National Observer*—Henley, a captive to the house, worked and meditated and gazed upon the river flowing, flowing. . . . He called it the river of Death. In the afternoon, he would talk with a friend or two in the drawing-room, which was opposite the study, on the first floor. The room wore a rich and sombre aspect; the brown walls were hung with fine etchings; and every piece of furniture was genuine and good. One remembers the scene most often at twilight; Henley

leaning forward in his chair, his stick laid near by, a cigarette burning in his fingers, talking with his shrewd, compelling eloquence; the dusk gathering; and without, the silent water, a gleam of dull silver, gliding beneath the shadowy ledges of the farther shore.

There are people, perhaps, who think of Henley as a bloodless, nervous valetudinarian. In truth, no impression could be more remote from reality. A man of massive build and great stature, charged with an immense vitality, gifted with an indomitable energy and a hearty enjoyment of the good things of life, he was condemned to a physical inaction which at times affected his health injuriously; but he had the constitution of a giant and the endurance of a hero.

After living for a year or two at Barnes he removed to Muswell Hill, to a house originally designed for a tavern, standing high up in an airy garden. What would have been the bar was actually the central hall, which was used as the living-room, and out of which the study opened. Here, Henley worked at the *Byron*; and selected

and arranged the definitive edition of his *Poems*, which was published in 1898. It was in 1898, also, that *The New Review* was discontinued.

The result was that Henley, at the age of forty-nine, the acknowledged master in letters, was left almost without income. He decided that he would never again edit a journal. "*Exit* W. E. H., editor," he wrote in the course of a letter addressed to the present writer. In these circumstances, Henley maintained his customary cheery stoicism, but the prospect was dark enough.

It was then that Mr. Balfour granted Henley a civil list pension of £225 a year; and so abolished at a stroke the grinding pressure of anxiety which Henley had borne all his life. All honour to Mr. Balfour: never was he better advised. Henley was not used to receiving benefits, though he was accustomed to bestowing them, and he was deeply affected.

In the following year, Henley removed to Worthing, to a secluded, comfortable house standing in a large garden, screened with trees. Here he wrote his verses

Hawthorn and Lavender, and his *Verses and Songs in Time of War*.[1] For the first time in his life he was free to write when he willed. Perhaps he touched, in these days, the crown of his achievement: yet he felt that his work was nigh done. It was during his sojourn at Worthing that he wrote the terrible verses beginning

> "In Shoreham River, hurrying down,"[2]

and the farewell—

> "So let me hence as one
> Whose part in the world has been dreamed out and done:"[3]

In the year 1900 he published in a thin volume *For England's Sake: Verses and Songs in Time of War*, setting forth in ringing numbers those noble emotions which war, and perhaps nothing save war, inspires. Upon the death of Queen Victoria Henley wrote *The Threnody for Queen Victoria*, surely one of the most splendid and solemn requiems in literature. It was first published in *The Morning Post*, then

[1] *Works.* Vol. II.
[2] *Hawthorn and Lavender*, XLVI, *Works*, Vol. II.
[3] *Ibid.*, L, *Works.* Vol. II.

privately printed as a broadside, and finally included in *Hawthorn and Lavender*.[1]

That lyric sequence was first published in *The North American Review*, the volume appearing in 1901. In the same year he edited the fine "Edinburgh folio" Shakespeare, another signal service to English letters. Among his work of these last years of his life are the preface to the collected edition of the *Poems* of T. E. Brown, his old schoolmaster at Gloucester; introductory essays to new editions of Smollett's works (1899); the works of Hazlitt (1902–4); the works of Henry Fielding (1908); prefaces to certain volumes of the American *edition de luxe* of the works of Charles Dickens; and an essay on *Othello* for the Caxton Shakespeare (1910) edited by Sir Sidney Lee.[2] The essay on T. E. Brown, the essays on Smollett, Hazlitt, Fielding and Othello, are included in the *Works*, Vols. III and IV.

In 1900, *Macaire* was performed by the Stage Society, London, on the 4th November at the Strand Theatre, and on the 8th November at the Great Queen Street Theatre.

[1] T. F. Henderson. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, 2nd Supp. [2] *Ibid.*

In 1901, Henley removed to a small house at Woking, closed in by a pine-wood. He also rented a small flat adjoining Battersea Park, spending a short time there now and again. While he was at Woking, Lord Northcliffe, who was a staunch and a kind friend to the poet, gave him his first experience of high-speed motoring: whereon Henley wrote *A Song of Speed*, published in *The World's Work*, April 1903, afterwards in separate form, and included in *Works*, Vol. II.

But that abundant and gallant life was drawing to its close. Henley suffered an accident in leaving a moving railway-carriage, and it seems that the shock inflicted grave injury upon the nervous system. Some time before the end, the present writer visited him, together with the late E. B. Iwan-Müller, an old friend of Henley. He was visibly suffering: his face wore a grey pallor; and he sat subdued, like one aware of the menace of the Shadow. We came away sick at heart. Iwan-Müller, who believed that he had a strange and an infallible faculty for perceiving the approach of death, told the present writer that our old chief was doomed. We never

saw him again. Travelling into Sussex on 11th June, 1903, the present writer opened the newspaper to read the news of his death. It was as if the sun had fallen out of the sky.

Henley had no fear of death; he had lived too near to death all his life to dread that which was to come, soon or late; rather had he a solemn looking-forward, a brave resignation; and his passing was in peace.

Henley was interred in the churchyard of Cockayne Hatley, beneath the monument that marks the grave of his daughter. It was wrought in bronze by the late Edward Onslow Ford, R.A., and the stone-work was designed by John William Simpson, F.R.I.B.A.

On 11th July, 1907, a memorial to Henley was unveiled in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral by the Earl of Plymouth, in the presence of many of the poet's friends. M. Rodin, as a gift, made a replica of the bust of Henley done by the French sculptor in 1886, and designed the marble setting within which the bust was placed.

From the measured and discerning tributes spoken to the memory of Henley on that occasion, it may be permitted to quote the following passages.[1]

Mr. George Wyndham said:

"It is the monument of a brave man and a true poet; of a man so brave that he would be sorry if I dwelt on the courage with which he bore the blows of fortune; of a poet so true that he sang ever from his own heart rather than to listeners; caring little for praise and nothing for censure. . . . He is the poet of generosity and order, of exuberant generosity and inexorable decrees. So he loved England. He loved the valour of England at war, when 'the loneliest death is fair with a memory of her flowers.' And he loved the plenty of England in peace. We may apply to him words written by Bagehot of Shakespeare—

"'This England lay before him, as it lies before us all, with its green fields, and its long hedgerows, and its many trees, and its great towns, and its endless hamlets, and its bold exploits and gathering power, and he saw that they were good.'

"Both a realist and a romantic he loved Nature, in a way pre-eminently English. His

[1] *The Henley Memorial.* (T. and A. Constable. Edinburgh. 1908.)

foregrounds, however sharply defined, ever haze off, from a blue middle-distance to

"'The promise of wistful hills,
The shining, shifting Sov'ranties of Dream.'[1]

"Yet for all his English love of Nature, and English way of interpreting Nature, he took infinite delight in the Art of France. It is, therefore, fitting that he should be commemorated by a great French artist in the heart of this, the greatest English city, where

"'. . . the high majesty of Paul's
Uplifts a voice of living light and calls,
Calls to his millions to behold and see
How goodly this his London Town can be.'[2]

". . . Such a man, and such a poet, came inevitably into collision with every view of life, and every theory of Art, which differed in any degree from his own. So there must needs be some to challenge his criticism of life and to criticise his theories of Art.

But even these may speak of him, as the old Jacobite spoke of William III., and say, 'Brave, brave, by Heaven, he deserves a Crown.'"

[1] *Arabian Nights' Entertainments. Works.* Vol. I.
[2] *London Voluntaries. Works.* Vol. II.

IV

CRITICISM AND JOURNALISM

HENLEY'S conception of journalism was that it should be treated as an art, in intention and in effect; in matter and in style. Each issue of the journal or the review should be a complete whole, part according with part and the whole fitting the requirements of the moment, with entertainment, with information and especially with comment. He was never concerned with daily journalism, except in respect of criticism: the business of the weekly review is chiefly critical; and Henley determined that criticism, as such, should be expressed in terms of art.

Again, he believed that a journal, while admitting and encouraging individual expression, should be informed with a single spirit, and that spirit the editor's. He once told Hutton of *The Spectator* that there were two papers in London with a temperament behind them—*The Spectator* and *The*

National Observer; and Hutton thought so too.

Henley commenced editor in December of the year 1877, at the age of twenty-eight, when he was appointed to the chair of *London*, a weekly review founded by Robert Glasgow Brown. Brown had been Stevenson's colleague on *The Edinburgh University Magazine*. In 1879 the paper was discontinued. Its brief career was brilliant enough. Some of Henley's own most admirable critical essays appeared in it; among them the masterpiece *Arabian Nights Entertainments*.[1]

"He that has the book of the *Thousand Nights and a Night* has Haschish-made-words for life. Gallant, subtle, refined, intense, humourous, obscene, here is the Arab intelligence drunk with conception. . . . It is the old immortal story of Youth and Beauty and their coming together, but it is coloured with the hard and brilliant hues of an imagination as sensuous in type and as gorgeous in ambition as humanity has known. . . . The air is horrible with the gross and passionate figments of Islamite mythology. Afrits watch over or molest them; they are made captive

[1] *Works.* Vol. V.

of malignant Ghouls; the Jinns take bodily form and woo them to their embraces. . . . And high over all, his heart contracted with the spleen of the East, the tedium of supremacy, towers the great Caliph Haroun, the buxom and bloody tyrant, a Muslim Lord of Misrule. . . ."

It would be worth while to quote at greater length, for in presenting such stuff as this, the young editor was deliberately putting before the public something it had never known. If any one else were capable of writing it, all that can be said is that no one did so.

Henley's criticism is a vision of interpretation. Facts, dates, and all the scholar's apparatus, were ranged orderly in his mind: these made the skeleton of the vivid, breathing thing he created; which was, not only an interpretation but, a work of art in itself. Though the reader of the essay on the *Arabian Nights* had never perused a line of Galland or of Burton or (best of all) of Mardrus, he would receive from Henley a knowledge and an illumination and a charm, themselves a great possession. To achieve this effect was, in Henley's view,

to achieve criticism. But when he began to write, English criticism was still an affair of computing influences, of compiling a speculative stud-book of the intellect, of indiscriminate condemnation and eulogy as indiscriminate, and the marking of labels. These dreary exercises were the expected: Henley's rare accomplishment was the unexpected, and, therefore, at first, the unacceptable. He had to find his audience. To-day, a young man who wrote thus and thus would find his public ready made: but it was Henley who made it.

In the meantime, like came to like; and Henley even in those days numbered among his contributors Robert Louis Stevenson and Andrew Lang. Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights* appeared in *London*, to be, not merely disregarded but, actually disliked. These romances have since, of course, passed into edition after edition.

Writing ten years after its cessation, Henley refers to *London* as "a print still remembered with affection by those concerned in it." And small wonder.

During the next ten years Henley wrote much for *The Saturday Review*. In those

days *The Saturday* was a kind of national institution. A survey of the close-printed, double-columned pages serves to mark the change which has passed upon journalism since they were printed. The articles are long, leisurely, detailed, scholarly. The politics are, of course, high Tory, a phrase which has long ceased to convey its original meaning. Political comment is distinguished by a gentlemanly, placid assumption of superiority and a bland certainty of conviction. Literary criticism is informed with knowledge, dealing with serious books seriously; and with current fiction, as with the subject unfailingly provided by a beneficent Providence for the perennial entertainment of the readers of *The Saturday*. These reviews are often admirably witty; it is to be hoped that the authors of the works so gaily crucified were amused by the process. Henley once said (to the present writer) that when he was about to edit *The National Observer*, he looked through the files of the *Saturday*, and he perceived that the rule was that no fiction should be praised. Henley determined that he would give praise where praise was due.

A signal instance—occurring before *The National Observer* began—should be recorded. It was Henley's review, published in 1885 in *The Athenæum*, of the work of George Meredith, which made possible the collected edition of that great novelist.

During these years Henley wrote also for *The Athenæum*, a paper which could if it would make the reputation of an author. He also contributed to *The St. James's Gazette* and *Vanity Fair*. For *The Pall Mall Gazette*, under the editorship of Mr. John Morley,[1] Henley wrote much dramatic criticism. He was gifted with a natural taste for the theatre; he had a wide knowledge of his subject; and, what is even more essential, he owned a quick sympathy with the actor, and an intimate understanding of the actor's powers and also of his limitations.

From this mass of journalistic work Henley selected what he thought of perdurable value: indeed, the greater part of the criticism included in his *Works* was first published in periodicals, from the *London* of 1877–9 to *The Pall Mall Magazine* of

[1] Now Lord Morley.

1903. Henley called it journalism: but in truth his republished work deals, not with the topics of the day but, with subjects whose interest is perennial; and the fact that these essays were first published in a periodical bears no relevance to their quality. The term journalism covers everything; to speak precisely, it simply means that which is published in a journal; and the implication of a kind of inferiority, as compared with literature, is purely adventitious.

Other examples of Henley's vision of interpretation are his *Homer and Theocritus*, *Herrick* and *Borrow*—to make a selection. The *Homer and Theocritus* is based upon the *Homer* of Messrs. Henry Butcher and Andrew Lang, and Lang's *Theocritus*.

"To read this *Odyssey* of theirs is to have a breath of the clear, serene airs that blew through the antique Hellas; to catch a glimpse of the large, new morning light that bathes the seas and highlands of the young heroic world. In a space of shining and fragrant clarity you have a vision of marble columns and stately cities, of men august in simple-heartedness and strength, and women comely and simple and superb as goddesses; and with

a music of leaves and winds and waters, of plunging ships and clanging armours, of girls at song and kindly gods discoursing, the sunny-eyed heroic age is revealed in all its nobleness, in all its majesty, its candour and its charm. The air is yet plangent with echoes of the leaguer of Troy" . . . .

What is this but a vision, a vision of the very dream of Homer himself? It *is* Homer. It is more: for the essay is inspired by the perception of that which Homer knew. Henley saw through the painted veil of the poet's imagining, to the ultimate reality. In this rare faculty of divination resides his extraordinary genius. He could interpret the artist because, divining what the artist was attempting to express, he could himself express it in his incomparable manner.

"In Herrick," he writes, "the air is fragrant with new-mown hay; there is a morning light upon all things; long shadows streak the grass, and on the eglantine swinging in the hedge the dew lies white and brilliant. . . . The flowers are maids to him, and the maids are flowers. . . . His pages breathe their clean and innocent perfumes, and are

beautiful with the chaste beauty of their colour, just as they carry with them something of the sweetness and simplicity of maidenhood itself. . . ."

Henley knew not only what the poet meant, but what other makers, touched by the same spirit, meant and did. "In his *Noble Numbers* Herrick shows himself to be a near kinsman of such men as Valdivielso, Ocaña, Lope de Ubeda . . ."[1] he writes; and so rounds the circle.

Turn to his *Borrow.* There could scarce exist two men more unlike each other than the seventeenth-century poet-parson and the nineteenth-century rover and emissary of the Bible Society. Yet Henley's apprehension of both artists is complete.

"There was no more use," writes Henley, "in sailing for Javan and Gadire; but at home there were highways in abundance, and what is your genuine tramp but a dry-land sailor? . . . Lavengro will always, I think, be found worthy of companionship, if only as the one exemplary artist-tramp the race has yet conceived. The artist-tramp, the tinker who can write, the horse-coper with a

[1] *Works.* Vol. V.

twang of Hamlet and a habit of Monte-Cristo—that is George Borrow. . . ." [1]

It is in such terms as these that Henley stamps at a blow the character of the artist, the quality and the rank of his achievement. He tells the student what the student, perhaps, would never discover by himself. Henley grasps the whole conception: but he also subjects it to analysis. The *Borrow* affords an example of both achievements; the *George Meredith*, an instance of the analytical and comparative method alone, applied to an exceedingly complex entity.

"In the world of man's creation his people are citizens to match the noblest; they are of the aristocracy of the imagination, the peers in their own right of the society of romance. And for all that, their state is mostly desolate and lonely and forlorn. . . . There *is* genius, but there is *not* felicity; that, one is inclined to say, is the distinguishing note of Mr. Meredith's work, in prose and verse alike . . . but he has charm as well as power, and, once his rule is accepted, there is no way to shake

[1] *Works.* Vol. V.

him off. . . . Always artistic, Mr. Meredith's work is often great art." [1]

The study of Meredith from which these passages are excepted was the result of recasting the several reviews which Henley had written at various times. For six-and-twenty years Meredith had suffered neglect and misunderstanding and ignorance, scarce relieved by infrequent and ineffectual praise. The comments of his detractors are forgotten like the stupid fashion of which they were the offspring. But Henley's verdict demanded, and received, acquiescence; and his judgment stands. For, to apply what Henley says of Berlioz to Henley himself: "His writings are one expression of an abnormal yet very natural individuality; and when he speaks you are sure of something worth hearing and remembering." And again, "In the Frenchman there is full measure of . . . the impatience of authority, the resolute and daring humour, the passion of worship for what is great in art and of contempt for what is little and bad. . . ." [2]

[1] *Works.* Vol. V. [2] *Ibid.*

The essays in *Views and Reviews, I*,[1] deal in a form of concentrated brilliance with many of the great English and a few of the great French writers. It must here suffice to give no more than a taste of their quality. It is safe to say that there is not in all literature so excellent a body of criticism packed into so narrow a space, nor any single volume which exercises an influence so potent and enduring.

In *Views and Reviews, II*,[2] Henley applies the same methods to the consideration of some great English, French and Dutch painters, and to the work of M. Rodin, of which Henley compelled recognition in this country. It begins with *A Note on Romanticism*, a masterly survey of what is known as the Romantic Movement in all the arts, dating (by convention) from 1830.

"We think of the Age of Pericles as the Age of Sculpture, of the Age of Elizabeth as the Age of the Poetic Drama. Romanticism brings into action the full orchestra of the arts. Good work was done in poetry and drama, history and fiction, painting, sculpture,

[1] *Works.* Vol. V. [2] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI.

and journalism, singing and acting, symphony and opera and song; and though much of it has perished, much has lived to be ranked with the best of its kind."

And with the work, good, or not so good, or bad, in every art, Henley was accurately and minutely acquainted. It is this extraordinary volume of knowledge that endows his criticism with its solid and irremovable foundations. You may disagree with his conclusions; but if you are to attack his premisses, you must go about the affair with dynamite—an enterprise which so far none has cared to attempt.

In his *Profiles Romantiques*, of the French romantic painters, Henley, with inimitable tact of handling, tells all that need be known concerning the artist himself, sets his work in its right relation to the time in which he lived, and to the conditions imposed upon him, and gives an appreciation of his art. Of Corot (for instance) Henley writes—

"He entered upon his career at a juncture when the classic convention, as developed by the descendants of the Poussins, was mined

with decay and tottering to its fall, and as yet the forerunners of Romanticism were but groping their way towards new truths and new ideals; and it was his to unite in his art the best tendencies of both the new school and the old. . . . In his most careless work there is always art and there is always quality —a strain of elegance, a thrill of style, a hint of the unseen; while at his best he is not only the consummate painter, he is also the most charming of poets. . . ." [1]

Be it remembered here also, in this matter of what is called art criticism, Henley was a pioneer. For Ruskin's beguiling eloquence was dedicated to quite other issues. Henley's *Catalogue* of the Loan Collection of French and Dutch pictures of the Edinburgh International Exhibition of 1886, from which many of the studies in *Views and Reviews, II*, are selected, was, as Henley says, "the first of its kind done in these Islands." [2] And, he writes, "at least I may claim to have read few books into my pictures, to have done my best to keep my painting more or less

[1] *Works.* Vol. VI.
[2] Prefatory, *Ibid.*

unlettered, to have proffered my conclusions, such as they are, fairly well purged of sentiment."

The professional painter may or may not consider the conclusions aforesaid to be of practical worth to himself: nor will the student learn how to paint from Henley, who never tried to teach other people a craft not his own; nevertheless, the student, and even the practitioner, may very well acquire from these pages, crammed with knowledge and informed with a subtle perception, a wider purview of their art than that which they had hitherto possessed, and of which, perhaps, they had never dreamed.

In 1882, at the age of thirty-three, Henley was appointed to the editorship of *The Magazine of Art*, which he conducted for four years. In those days, the process of photographic reproduction had not been perfected; illustrations, therefore, being cut on wood, or engraved upon stone or metal, were few because costly. In *The Magazine of Art* one picture, at least, was reproduced in each number, accompanied by a brief and vivid comment, apparently

done by the editor. For the rest, there were illustrated articles and wood drawings; verses; criticism, careful and informing. There were, for instance, "The Cruise of the *Rover*," illustrated by Seymour Lucas; contributions by Miss J. E. Harrison upon "Classic Art"; by Cosmo Monkhouse on Pre-Raphaelitism; by Sidney (now Sir Sidney) Colvin on Velasquez; a ballad by Austin Dobson; a note on sculpture by Leader Scott; Miss Kate Greenaway on "Art in the Nursery"; Mr. Basil Champneys on "St. Paul's"; articles by Mr. David Hannay, Mr. William Archer, Mr. Lewis F. Day, R. L. Stevenson, Mrs. Meynell, Andrew Lang (on Elzevirs) and R. A. M. Stevenson—to select at random. These pages are sown with the names of painters who were then young men, and who have since achieved renown. The comments upon the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1884, include the names of Herbert, Goodall, Faed, Sant, Storey, Marcus Stone, Calderon, Horsley, Sidney Cooper, H. W. B. Davis, Blair Leighton, Millais—"the most popular painter of his time"—Leighton, Alma-Tadema, Frank Holl, Briton Rivière,

Linton, Poynter, Long, Petrie, Vicat Cole, Hook, Albert Moore, Henry Moore, Prinsep, Wells, Leslie, Dicksee, Macbeth, Colin Hunter, Orchardson, Fildes, Boughton, Woods, Reid, Brett, Leader, Murray, Waterhouse, Gregory, Richmond, Yeames, Frith. To peruse the list is to feel young again; or, perhaps, to feel old.

In a word, *The Magazine of Art*, under Henley, provided the public with all they needed to know of the art of the time, with good store of matter of intrinsic interest, with sober and instructive criticism. In that magazine they learned of Rodin's work and of the work of James McNeill Whistler something they did not know before. Nor was there ever a number in which the editor did not illuminate some point or aspect of art as only he could illuminate it.

In November 1889, Henley began to edit *The Scots Observer*, succeeding to the second or third number. It was first published in Edinburgh; afterwards, the name being changed to *The National Observer*,[1] in London. Henley, according to his wont,

[1] Called in these pages *The National Observer* without distinction.

speedily gathered to him a notable band of writers. Among these were: H. O. Arnold-Forster, J. M. Barrie, T. E. Brown, Frederick Greenwood, David Hannay, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Andrew Lang, H. D. Lowry, Alice Meynell, Arthur Morrison, Gilbert (now Sir Gilbert) Parker, Harold Parsons, G. S. Street, G. W. Steevens, R. L. Stevenson, A. C. Swinburne, H. B. Marriott Watson, Francis Watt, H. G. Wells, Charles Whibley, W. B. Yeats.

Mr. J. Nicol Dunn (afterwards editor of *The Morning Post*, now (1913) editor of the Johannesburg *Star*), assisted the editor for some time. Mr. Charles Whibley was Henley's chief of staff, so to speak, acting as assistant-editor as well as contributing largely.

The National Observer cut a deep notch on the journalistic tally. Except *London*, there had been nothing quite like it, nor has there been anything like it since. Those glowing and gallant pages inspired much that is good in the journalism of to-day; nor will any deny that they wrought some considerable execution upon what was bad.

"The old-fashioned journalist," remarked *The National Observer*, "was a drunkard sometimes and a pedant generally; but he knew his place and was not anxious to rule the world. The new-fashioned gentleman of the Press is a teetotaller, a vegetarian, and a Thinker; but he is also a cad, he worships the unwomanly in woman, and he contributes articles to reviews on the subject of Government by Journalism." [1]

Here was plain dealing enough. The adversary henceforth knew what to expect; and he never failed to receive it. *Magna est veritas:* but most people liked her to wear the disguise to which they were accustomed. Others rejoiced in that a man was found who was not afraid to speak his mind; to these, the appearance of *The National Observer* was the event of the week. There they might read in sturdy, vivid English what honest men were thinking. If people were shocked, so much the worse for them. And in those days, a generation since, prudery was the mode. It is not, however, to be supposed that Henley and his men offended against decorum. To

[1] *The Scots Observer*, April 26, 1890.

peruse those pages to-day, is to marvel at the singular scruples held by our fathers and mothers, which moved them to regard *The National Observer* with so unaccountable a suspicion. Reticence is a good thing, no doubt, but it may be pushed too far. About 1890, it had become an organised hypocrisy, a dread of reality which rotted every department of society. It was a disease to which the English had become peculiarly liable; and from which they still suffer. But there has been a change; and the change was largely wrought by *The National Observer*. It cleared the air like a thunderstorm. It rallied the scattered regiments, disheartened by the vast and tyrannic sovereignty of complacent humbug, appalled at the immense delusions engendered by a pitiless commercialism, and disgusted by the essential artifice of public life. Many a man who never beheld Henley in the flesh has been inspired by him with new courage.

For Henley never destroyed where he did not build up. If he attacked bad journalism, he showed how good journalism could be achieved. If he denounced traitors,

he pointed the road to honest men. If he condemned bad art, he demonstrated in what good art consists. If he could not away with pretence or with slovenly craftsmanship, the aspirant who meant what he tried to do was welcomed, cheered, admonished and inspired.

Above all, Henley was gifted with that rare and nameless quality which draws out of a man the best that is in him. His rule of the journal was despotic; but it was the kindliest despotism, the most generous autocracy. His young men, as they were sometimes called, would have sold the shirts off their backs for him. As for Henley, he would give of his time and brains and experience lavishly, with both hands, grudging nothing, to people whom, perhaps, he had never seen.

The present writer remembers calling at Henley's house upon a day when the poet was far from well. Henley remarked that he had received a letter asking for his counsel; and he had written in reply, "pointing out that the knowledge of life of a boy of nineteen scarce fitted him to write fiction. . . . It was a long letter," he added wearily. Indeed, he had written several pages.

And the present writer once said something of benefits received in his own case. "Well, well," said Henley, gently, "try to help the aspirant in your turn."

The aspirant in journalism—or, indeed, in any branch of literature—would be well advised to look up the bound volumes of *The National Observer*. He will find some strange things, and things which will serve him in many ways. Among other matters, he will remark the extraordinary likeness, co-existing with unlikeness, of the posture of affairs to present conditions; and probably the same observation will hold good twenty years hence.

For instance, this book is being written in November 1912. In *The National Observer* of January 25, 1890, occurs the following passage—

> "With the adoption of Home Rule, Mr. Gladstone abandoned the power to say 'No' to the extremists. And the extremists, of course, know it. They will allow him to dismember the Empire, but they will first secure his acceptance of their own fallacies and fads."

How many newspapers of like views are

saying the same thing to-day, in slightly different words? But here is something which, perhaps, they have not said: "*Is it not cowardice that is at the bottom of it all?*"

It falls to be remembered, also, that in those days it was not the fashion to assume that the Empire was worth much consideration. One of those who knew what the Empire was and what it might mean, was the late Harold Parsons, traveller, scholar and enthusiast. He wrote much for Henley, who used to say that he never touched or altered Parsons' work—a rare compliment.

It was in *The National Observer* that many of Mr. Kipling's first series of *Barrack Room Ballads* appeared. And on March 8, 1890, after the Parnell Commission, Henley published Mr. Kipling's *Cleared!* though every other editor of standing in London had been afraid to touch that red-hot and righteous indictment.

The National Observer fought a good fight, led many a forlorn hope, unfurled many a brave flag, put pale fear in the hearts of many an enemy, heartened many a valiant soul; took ill fortune and good hap with an

equal smile; and set free many a spirit in prison which is working in the world to-day. Hail and Farewell.

After *The National Observer* came *The New Review*, a monthly magazine; of which it must here suffice to say that it was *The National Observer* transformed in shape, written by the same men, and conducted by the same chief with the old indomitable courage. There has been nothing like it since. For by the time it was discontinued, in 1898, the flood of the cheap journal, the cheap magazine, had begun to flow. The ebb is not yet; but the tide will turn in time, and *The New Review* will serve as an exemplar in that endeavour to establish and to maintain the standard of English letters, which no commercialism has hitherto succeeded in wholly defeating.

V

POETRY

It is sometimes said that Henley's total bequest of verse was meagre in quantity. But has it been considered how many waggon-loads of fragrant blossom go to the distillation of a single ounce of attar of roses? Or how many thousand lines of the complete works of some renowned makers, the world (were she honest) would cheerfully consign to oblivion? Henley never gave but of his best. Nor has the world yet come to understand that his best ranks with the best in literature.

What Henley wrote of Dr. Gordon Hake may not unfitly be applied to Henley himself:—

"He has taken nothing from his contemporaries, but has imagined a message for himself, and has chosen to deliver it in terms that are wholly his own." . . . He "concerns himself with absolutes—the eternal elements

of human life and the immutable tides of human destiny. . . ." [1]

Henley, however, concerns himself to rare purpose with other matters also.

While he was yet a patient in the Old Edinburgh Infirmary, some of his verse from the *In Hospital* series had been accepted by *The Cornhill Magazine*, and some had been rejected. The unrhymed rhythms, whatever the editor may have thought of them, were not considered by him to be suitable for family reading. They were starkly realistic, new, daring and uncompromising. Matthew Arnold had experimented with the metrical form; Henley developed it to new uses. He believed that there were certain emotions and experiences which could rightly be presented in no other form.[2] Having been also rejected by every other "editor of standing in London—I had well-nigh said in the world," [3] they were published in *A Book of Verses*.[4]

[1] *Works.* Vol. V.
[2] Preface to *Poems*, 1898. (London: David Nutt.)
[3] *Ibid.* [4] *A Book of Verses.* 1888. (London: David Nutt.)

The first of these in the series is *Waiting*, of which the first stanza is :—

> "A square, squat room (a cellar on promotion)
> Drab to the soul, drab to the very daylight;
> Plasters astray in unnatural-looking tin-ware;
> Scissors and lint and apothecary's jars."

The fragment exemplifies an extraordinary sense of the pictorial quality of words : a sense which Henley owned and exercised to a degree only equalled by the greatest masters. Mr. W. B. Yeats (with an Irishman's assurance) once told Henley that the *In Hospital* unrhymed rhythms were "not poetry." Whether or not they accord with the various definitions of that art, they undoubtedly manifest the absolute accomplishment of the effect which the poet designed to achieve. And in all the verse of Henley which his extremely drastic sifting has permitted to survive, there is not one instance in which the effect, whatever it may be, has not been perfectly attained. That is the mark of the great artist. By means of what intolerable labour and indefatigable patience it is won, let those tell who have trodden the same steep road.

But the young man of five-and-twenty

who handled unrhymed rhythms with so assured a mastery of his material, wrought also in the forms of old French verse. Some of these were included by Gleeson White in his *Anthology*, published in 1887.[1] They are now included in Henley's *Works*, Vols. I and II. Here, for instance, are the Ballade, the Rondel, the Rondeau, the Villanelle. Of the Ballades, *Of Youth and Age* was written to accompany a picture. The last stanza and the envoy are quoted.

> "Hours that strut as the heirs of time,
> Deeds whose rumour's a clarion-call,
> Songs where the singers their souls sublime—
> Youth is the sign of them one and all.
> A staff that rests in a nook of wall,
> A reeling battle, a rusted gage,
> The chant of a nearing funeral—
> These are a type of the world of Age.
>
> *Envoy*
>
> Struggle and turmoil, revel and brawl—
> Youth is the sign of them, one and all.
> A smouldering hearth and a silent stage—
> These are a type of the world of Age."

The Ballade *Of Dead Actors*, in the *Works*, is dedicated to the memory of

[1] *Ballads and Rondeaus, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles, etc.*, edited by Gleeson White. (London: 1887.) sq. 18mo.

Edward Henley, to whom, in his lifetime, it was originally inscribed.

"The curtain falls, the play is played :
The Beggar packs beside the Beau ;
The Monarch troops, and troops the Maid ;
The Thunder huddles with the Snow.
Where are the revellers high and low ?
The clashing swords ? The lover's call ?
The dancers gleaming row on row ?
Into the night go one and all.

Envoy

Prince, in one common overthrow
The Hero tumbles with the Thrall :
As dust that drives, as straws that blow,
Into the night go one and all."

Heré glitters and sings the very spirit of the Stage; and then the lights go down; and when *The Thunder huddles with the Snow*, the reader is sensibly startled by the curious inconsistent effect of the cunning juxtaposition of words.

From the Rondels here is a stanza :—

"The ways of Death are soothing and serene,
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.
From camp and church, the fireside and the street,
She beckons forth—and strife and song have been."

And from a Rondeau—

"Let us be drunk, and for a while forget,
Forget and, ceasing even from regret,

Live without reason and in spite of rhyme,
As in a dream preposterous and sublime,
Where place and hour and means for once are met."

And from a Villanelle :—

"Where's the use of sighing?
Sorrow as you may,
Time is always flying—

Flying !—and defying
Men to say him nay . . .
Where's the use of sighing?"

In all three—chosen at random—like the rest, the form is old : the effect, intensely modern.

And for a last example of this kind, illustrating the poet's marvellous command of every phase of language, the essay in thieves' slang, *Villon's Straight Tip to all Cross Coves*, beginning—

"Suppose you screeve? or go cheap-jack?
Or fake the broads? or fig a nag?
Or thimble-rig? or knap a yack?
Or pitch a snide? or smash a rag?
Suppose you duff? or nose and lag?
Or get the straight, and land your pot?
How do you melt the multy swag?
Booze and the blowens cop the lot."

The series grouped under the title of *Echoes* consists almost wholly of lyrics :

the lyric, according to the definition presented with so consummate a clarity in the preface to *English Lyrics*, being "a single emotion temperamentally expressed in terms of poetry." Among these are the verses which, written in 1875, have since rung throughout the English-speaking world, a call of high courage, of undefeated and undefeatable fortitude. The last stanza—

> "It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate:
> I am the captain of my soul."

It was no weakling's vaunt of defiance. What was the secret of Henley's courage? That—if you find it at all—will be found in his verse, in the solemn and splendid vision of a seer. *Aquí estú encerrada el alma del licenciado Pedro Garcías*, is the legend with which Henley precedes the *Echoes*. It is a brave soul that lies there enshrined in so nobly wrought a setting. His was a spirit that knew love, and dwelt familiarly with death, and was acquainted with sorrow, and defied pain, rejoicing greatly in every manifestation of

life, and ranging free over all the world, the passionate lover (above all) of beauty.

> "At whatever source we drink it,
> Art or love or faith or wine,
> In whatever terms we think it
> It is common and divine."[1]

Here was no sheltered dreamer: destiny had attended to that matter. Here was a strong and lusty man among men, who had rubbed shoulders with the world, and had looked undismayed upon the worst of it. He was rooted in the good earth like an oak, whose branches took the wind and the sunshine, and pointed to the stars.

> "Madam Life's a piece in bloom
> Death goes dogging everywhere:
> She's the tenant of the room,
> He's the ruffian on the stair.
>
> You shall see her as a friend,
> You shall bilk him once and twice;
> But he'll trap you in the end,
> And he'll stick you for her price."[2]

It is a point of view: and (Heaven knows) true enough, But it is not all the truth. One thing at a time—that is life's way, and the way of the lover of life.

[1] *Echoes*, VI. *Works*. Vol. VI.
[2] *Ibid.*, IX. *Works*. Vol. I.

"Yet beautiful and spacious
The wise, old world appears.
Yet frank and fair and gracious
Outlaugh the jocund years.
Our arguments disputing,
The universal Pan
Still wanders fluting—fluting—
Fluting to maid and man." [1]

Let those who will try to formulate a philosophy from Henley's verse: but assuredly it is a vain enterprise. For philosophy, as such, was to him (as he once remarked) like chalk in the mouth. His poetry *is* his philosophy: that is, what he made of life; and for that very reason alone it cannot be expressed in other terms. For there are not two ways of expressing a given conception; there is only one. And the seer is above the philosopher, because, where the philosopher constructs a theory, the seer *sees*. That is what he is for. And of his vision, how superbly pictured soever, no man can decipher more than he is fit to decipher. But—

". . . They that have heard the overword
Know life's a dream worth dreaming." [2]

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[1] *Echoes*, XXVIII. *Works*. Vol. I.
[2] *Ibid.*, XXIII. *Works*. Vol. I.

Henley's work is so various, and embraces so wide a sphere of thought and emotion, that to suggest its character in a formula is merely impossible. It may, however, be observed that his faculty of identifying mood, emotion and visible things, is very remarkable.

> "Space and dread and the dark—
> Over a livid stretch of sky
> Cloud-monsters crawling like a funeral train
> Of huge, primeval presences
> Stooping beneath the weight
> Of some enormous, rudimentary grief;
> While in the haunting loneliness
> The far sea waits and wanders with a sound
> As of the trailing skirts of Destiny,
> Passing unseen
> To some immitigable end
> With her gray henchman, Death."[1]

It is not that the poet here uses what is called imagery to symbolise an emotion. Passages such as that which is here quoted are not metaphorical; rather are they an interpretation of nature. To conceive of nature and the soul, the visible and the invisible, as wrought of one texture like the past and present and future, is the

[1] *Rhymes and Rhythms*, XVI. *Works.* Vol. I.

modern note. And it is inspired by the conviction born of intuition. In this quality resides the curious sympathy existing between some of Henley's work and the work of James Thomson ("B.V.").

Compare Thomson's

> "In the vast vague grey,
> Mistily luminous, brightly dim
> The trees to the south there, far away,
> Float as beautiful, strange and grand
> As pencilled palm-trees, every line
> Mystic with a grace divine,
> In our dreams of the holy Eastern Land." [1]

This stanza, together with those preceding and succeeding it, make a prelude of serene and joyful anticipation, in which the mood of the poet and the mood of nature are indistinguishable. That unity is wonderfully preserved throughout the whole of *Sunday up the River*, which in its way is a masterpiece of lyrical narrative. The verses were written in 1865; but they have the modern note. The poet is not saying things about life: he is presenting life itself, and his verse is itself a living thing: that is its essential distinction.

[1] *Sunday up the River, The City of Dreadful Night and other Poems*, by James Thomson ("B.V."). (London: Reeves & Turner. 1888.)

But, indeed, that office has always been fulfilled by the poet, though not by all poets, who are often the creatures of their time. If the thought of the time conceives of man as a being constituted apart from nature, and charged, under frightful penalties, with the predominant duty of appeasing a wrathful Deity, the poet's vision may be closed in by these thick curtains of the Temple. And if he tears them aside and lets in the sunlight, he is called an atheist, and so forth Then comes Science, slow-footed, austere, equipped with measuring rod and scales, to build an altar in the open air to the Unknown God. For the god of science is Nescience : and in the void she makes, the poet is at least free to follow the gleam. For example :—

> "The nightingale has a lyre of gold,
> The lark's is a clarion call,
> And the blackbird plays but a boxwood flute,
> But I love him best of all.
>
> For his song is all of the joy of life,
> And we in the mad, spring weather,
> We two have listened till he sang
> Our hearts and lips together."[1]

[1] *Echoes,* XVIII. *Works.* Vol. I.

It is the eternal note of the true romance, which also is of God; and its

> "Taproot drinks of the Sacred Springs
> In the living rock of Law."[1]

Henley was ever straitly bound upon the quest of the spirit immanent in every manifestation of life; which, he said, is—

> ". . . worth living
> Through every grain of it
> To the last edge
> Of the cornerstone, death."

To seek out and grasp the spirit behind the veil, in whatever that spirit might consist, and to embody it in music which is one with the music of the spheres, whose harmonies were written in his heart—that was the high adventure which Henley boldly and joyously set out to achieve. Whither it might lead him he knew not, nor sought to discern; and it led him, undaunted, into strange places; to the confines of the region of the soul, to the very frontiers of the hereafter.

That which he found he forged into verse, more durable than brass or marble, delicate as the sunlit foam upon a breaking wave,

[1] *Rhymes and Rhythms*, XVII. *Works*. Vol. I.

strong like bronze. From the realism of the *Hospital* verses, from the gay skill of the ballads and rondels and villanelles, from the lyric fire of the *Echoes* and *Rhymes and Rhythms*, he turns to the epic in little of *The Song of the Sword*, written in the form of the saga. It is the song of the victory of might over evil in their age-long conflict, mystically symbolised: it is:—

> "*The Sword*
> *Singing——*
> *The voice of the Sword from the heart of the Sword*
> *Clanging imperious*
> *Forth from Time's battlements*
> *His ancient and triumphing Song.*"

In these resounding, swift and glittering stanzas there are intertwined and interwoven the bright and indestructible threads of honour and self-sacrifice and valour and the sheer elemental delight in battle, as it were plucked from the gross heart of centuries of tumult and indecipherable confusion.

After the saga of the Sword there came the changing vision of the enormous city, sinister and splendid, squalid and deadly

and superb, presented in the noble harmonies of the *London Voluntaries*, with their magical opening—

> "St. Margaret's bells
> Quiring their innocent, old-world canticles
> Sing in the storied air,
> All rosy-and-golden, as with memories
> Of woods at evensong, and sands and seas
> Disconsolate for that the night is nigh." [1]

Afterwards came the rich and wistful melodies of *Hawthorn and Lavender*, of which he writes—

> "*My songs were once of the sunrise :*
> *They shouted it over the bar ;*
> *First-footing the dawns, they flourished,*
> *And flamed with the morning star.*
>
> *My songs are now of the sunset :*
> *Their brows are touched with light,*
> *But their feet are lost in the shadows*
> *And wet with the dews of night.*" [2]

And of which the *Praeludium* chants the mystic union of nature's continual procession from autumn to spring, from death to resurrection, with the harmonies of colour and of music—"this visual orchestra"—a wonder of subtle artistry.

[1] *London Voluntaries. Works.* Vol. II.
[2] *Envoy. Ibid.*

"In sumptuous chords, and strange,
Through rich yet poignant harmonies:
Subtle and strong browns, reds
Magnificent with death and the pride of death,
Thin, clamant greens
And delicate yellows that exhaust
The exquisite chromatics of decay:"

Then came the war; and Henley, who was a born fighting man, put by his farewells, his

"Content, this miracle of being alive
Dwindling, that I, thrice weary of worst and best,
May shed my duds, and go
From right and wrong,
And, ceasing to regret, and long, and strive,
Accept the past, and be for ever at rest."[1]

Or rather, that matter settled, he turned, instant and eager, to England's need, on fire with the old, immortal spirit of England's prowess in arms. Of the political chicaneries of the hour he recked nothing. In his heart there burned the rose of England's valour. The splendid *Levy of Shields*[2] shows what he meant.

"Edward the Prince, here in Canterbury Minster
Between his deathless Victories, under his triumphing shield,
Sleeps these five hundred years,
Like his archers of Poitiers—
O, the dear immortal Namelesses of that transcending field!

[1] *Hawthorn and Lavender*, L. *Works.* Vol. II.
[2] *For England's Sake,*[23] IV. *Ibid.*

And out in the working world, out in Canterbury
Barracks,
You hear the drums of England beat, the bugle of
England blow
Notes of empery that break
Like a song for England's sake
On your dream of the mighty captain that had led
you long ago."

And ere the war was ended—that war of which shameful memories cannot dim the lustre of its brave deeds and stubborn courage, or tarnish the tradition of the Service Men—the great Queen died, and with her passing there passed the Victorian age, a thing unique in history, the wonder of the world. Henley, the last of the Victorian poets, wrote her elegy.

"*Sceptre and orb and crown,*
High ensigns of a sovranty containing
The beauty and strength and state of half a World,
Pass from her, and she fades
Into the old, inviolable peace."[1]

So runs the prelude to that moving and majestic dirge, fit requiem even for the Queen.

The vast and climbing wave, that hove England so high, had towered to its height, and fallen. Henley did not live to behold

[1] *Reginæ Dilectissimæ Victoriæ Epicedia. Works.* Vol. II.

the tragic, inevitable descent. Foreseeing it or not, he held to the essential: and, in the memory of the Queen, bequeathed this, her message, to the new generation:—

"Let the new memory
Be as the old, long love! So, when the hour
Strikes, as it must, for valour of heart,
Virtue, and patience, and unblenching hope,
And the inflexible resolve
That, come the world in arms,
This breeder of nations, England, keeping the seas
Hers as from God, shall in the sight of God
Stand justified of herself
Wherever her unretreating bugles blow!
Remember that she lived
That this magnificent Power might still perdure—
Your friend, your passionate servant, counsellor,
Queen."

When Henley passed into the great silence, his aspiration, which he had made into verse twenty-seven years before his time came, was fulfilled.

"So be my passing!
My task accomplished and the long day done,
My wages taken, and in my heart
Some late lark singing,
Let me be gathered to the quiet west,
The sundown splendid and serene,
Death."[1]

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[1] *Echoes*, XXXV. *Works*. Vol. I.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PUBLICATIONS, ETC.

1875. Contributions to *Encyclopædia Britannica.* (Messrs. A. & C. Black.)
1877–9. Edited *London.*
1879–88. Contributions to *Athenæum, Pall Mall Gazette, St. James's Gazette, Saturday Review, Vanity Fair.*
1882. *Deacon Brodie* produced at Bradford.
1882–6. Edited *Magazine of Art.*
1884. *Beau Austin* ; *Admiral Guinea.*
1885. *Macaire.*
1887. *Mephisto* produced.
1888. *A Book of Verses.*
1889–94. Edited *The National Observer,* at first called *The Scots Observer.*
1890. *Views and Reviews, I.*
Beau Austin produced at Haymarket Theatre, London.
1891. *Lyra Heroica.*
1892. *The Song of the Sword and Other Verses.*
Views and Reviews, II.
Three Plays: *Deacon Brodie, Beau Austin, Admiral Guinea* ; collected edition.
Began editing Tudor Translations, not completed at death ; Florio's *Montaigne.*
1893. *London Voluntaries and Other Verses.*
1894. First part, with Mr. J. S. Farmer, *Slang and its Analogues* ; last part, 1904.
A Book of English Prose, with Mr. Charles Whibley.
1894–8. Edited *The New Review.*
Macaire added to collected edition of Plays.

1895. Preface to the Poetry of William Blunt.
A London Garland from Four Centuries of Verse.

1896–7. Edited *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, 4 vols., with Mr. T. F. Henderson; essay on *Burns's Life, Genius and Achievement.*

1897. *Admiral Guinea* produced.
Edited *Byron's Letters and Verse*, Vol. I, with biographical sketches.
English Lyrics: Chaucer to Pope.

1898. *Poems*, definitive edition.
London Types, quatorzains by W. E. Henley, drawings by William Nicholson.

1899. Introductory essays to editions of Smollett.

1900. *For England's Sake: Verses and Songs in Time of War.*
Macaire produced.
Preface to collected edition *Poems* of T. E. Brown.

1901. *Hawthorn and Lavender.*
Edited *Edinburgh Folio Shakespeare.*
Introductory essay to edition of Hazlitt.

1903. *A Song of Speed.*
Introductory essay to edition of Fielding.
Prefaces to various novels in American *edition de luxe* of the works of Charles Dickens.
Essay on *Othello* for Caxton Shakespeare, 1910.

1908. Collected *Works*, limited edition, 6 vols. (London. David Nutt).

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